Part 2: Colorado River

Colorado River Subzones

Inventory and Analysis of Existing Conditions: Colorado River

A resource inventory and analysis was conducted in the summer of 1985 to determine existing conditions of the Colorado River from Longhorn Dam to five miles downstream at the confluence with Walnut Creek. The purpose of this effort was to assess the recreation suitability and land use characteristics of the area, draw conclusions and identify issues. It is important to recognize that a comprehensive resource assessment and more thorough analysis is warranted.

Though preliminary, this assessment established an information base as an initiative for future comprehensive planning, and provided a basis for developing initial goals and policy recommendations. Criteria for conducting the study were focused on river use, riverfront compatiblity and potential resource values in the Corridor.

Physical Context

A five mile stretch of the Colorado River, immediately east of Longhorn Dam to the confluence of Walnut Creek, was included in the Corridor Study. The drainage areas of Walnut Creek, Little Walnut Creek and Boggy Creek (and its Fort, Givens Park and Tannehill branches) join the river on the north shore while Country Club Creek joins the river on the south shore.

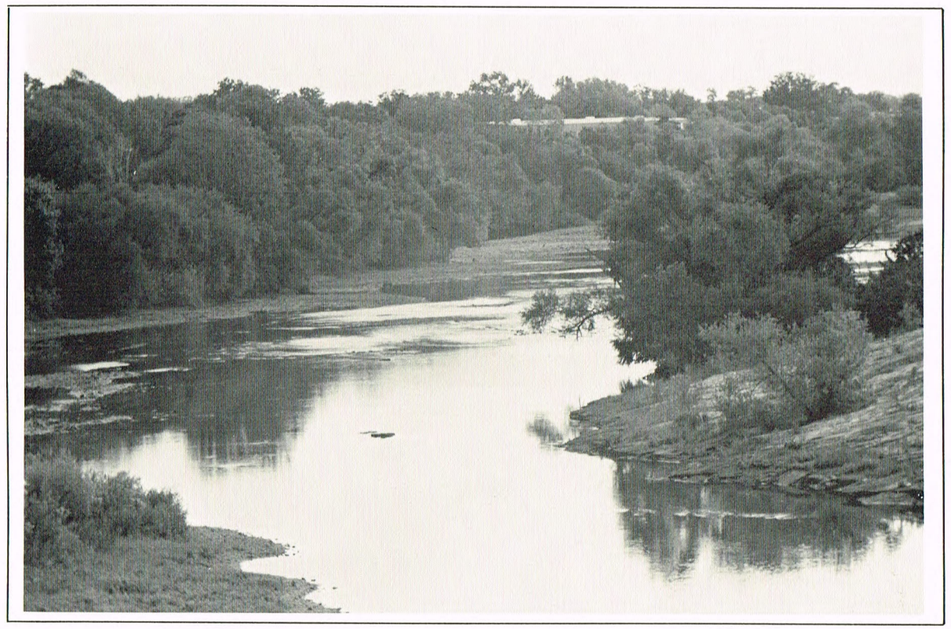
The free-flowing river is dramatically different in character from the upstream lake and its highly urbanized environment. The variable level river is influenced by hydrologic and meterologic impacts. Water release for hydroelectricity and downstream irrigation transforms a bucolic river into a bank-to-bank, fast flowing waterway. Heavy rains can create a dangerous and debris-laden situation.

Three distinct zones characterize the Corridor: the Montopolis zone, the Treatment Plant and Aggregate zone, and the Boggy-Walnut Creek zone.

Montopolis Zone—This area extends approximately two miles downstream from Longhorn Dam to west of the Govalle Wastewater discharge point. Major access is at the boat launch area beneath Montopolis Bridge. Pedestrian access occurs on both shores immediately below the dam, from undeveloped areas of Krieg Complex, on a myriad of trails from Red Bluff Road and Levander Loop, and bluff trails from Grove Park (Colorado River Park).

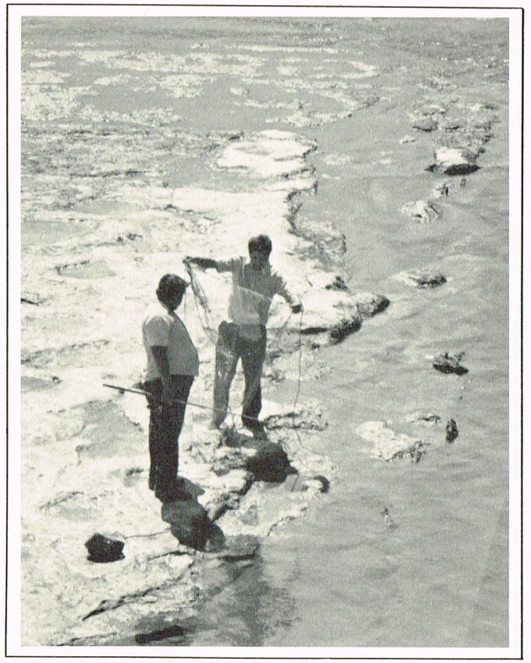
This zone sustains an exceptionally high participation in recreational activities which include float-fishing, canoeing, general waterplay, photography, bird-watching, picnicking, refuge and respite.

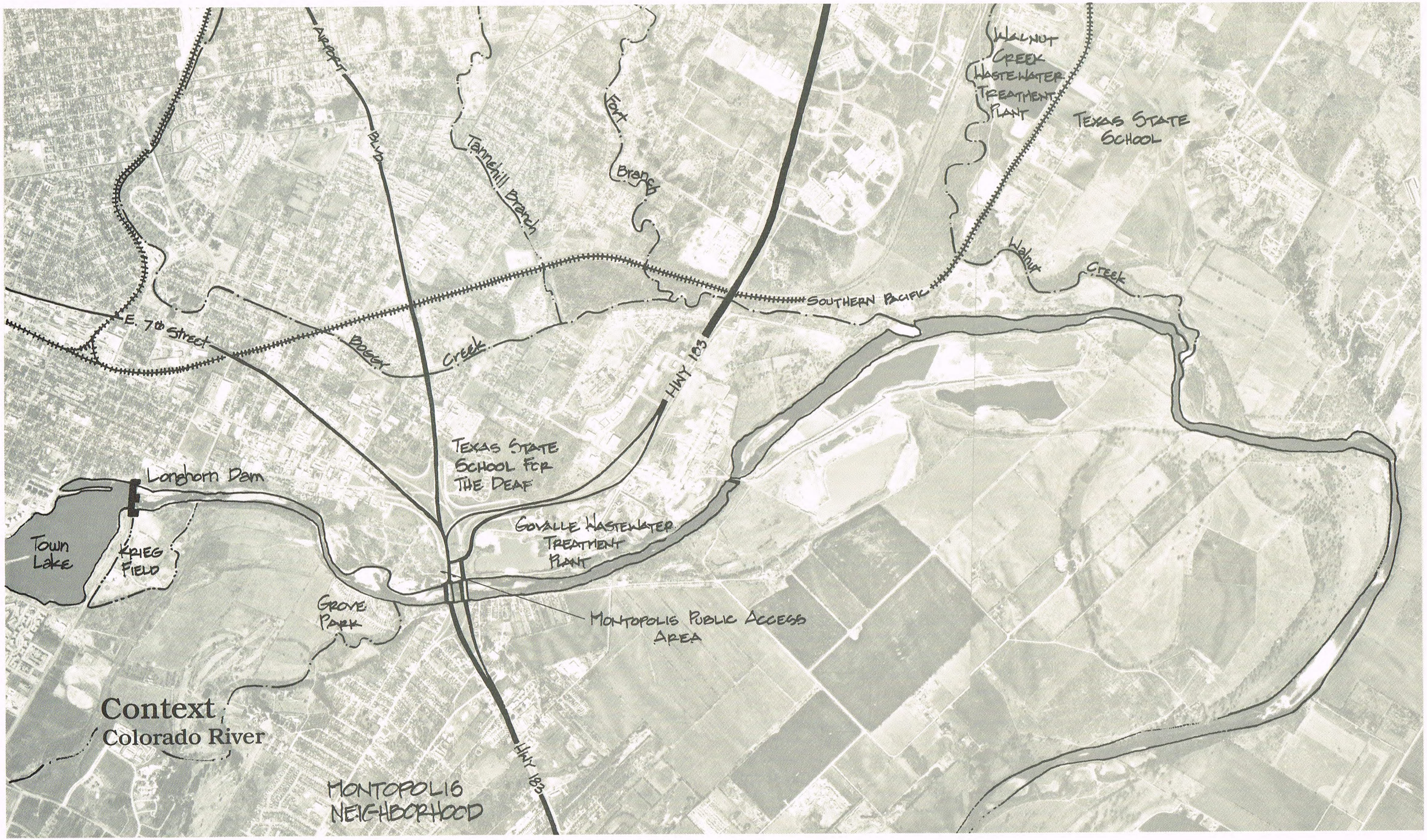
Treatment Plant and Aggregate Zone—The treatment plant discharge creates highly polluted murky conditions for 1½ miles; the extensive resource extraction operation also contributes to the change in water quality. As a rule, boat anglers fish above or below this area, and canoeists paddle through without pause. The lack of aquatic vegetation, noise of extraction equipment, diminished visual quality and offensive odors make this zone a most unpleasant area.



Boggy-Walnut Creek Zone—The last one mile stretch is scenic and is almost as popular as the Montopolis zone. Anglers launch boats downstream near the Imperial Drive area, motor up-river and drift downstream. Egrets, herons and cranes wade the shallows, and the more densely wooded north shore provides an interesting habitat.

Viewed as a comprehensive recreation system, the Colorado River and Town Lake present a unique opportunity to provide varied outdoor receation pursuits for the metropolitan area.




Airport Blvd
Tannehill Branch
Fort Branch
Walnut Creek Wastewater Treatment Plant
Texas State School
Walnut Creek
Southern Pacific
E. 7th Street
Boggy Creek
Hwy 183
Texas State School for the Deaf
Govalle Wastewater Treatment Plant
Longhorn Dam
Town Lake
Krieg Field
Grove Park
Montopolis Public Access Area
Context
Colorado River
Montopolis Neighborhood
Hwy 183

Existing Land Use

Colorado River

- Single Family Residential
- Commercial
- Industrial
- Institutional
- Utilities
- Parkland
- Mobile Home

Land Use, Zoning and Access

Land use and zoning patterns in this portion of the Colorado River Corridor generally do not reflect sensitivity to the inherent scenic and recreational qualities. Existing zoning permits light industrial and interim single family uses. Public access to the river is difficult because of extensive private ownership and lack of roadways.

Land Use—This area consists of land along the Colorado River from Longhorn Dam to the eastern City limits at Walnut Creek. The north shore is bounded by Pleasant Valley Road on the west and the City limits on the east. The north boundary is defined by East 1st Street to Ed Bluestein Boulevard to the Southern Pacific Railroad line to their intersection with Walnut Creek, which flows into the Colorado River.

The southern shore is bounded by Pleasant Valley Road on the west and the City limits on the east, and on the south by the extension of South Lakeshore Boulevard.

Colorado River Corridor Land Use

Use	Acres	%
Single Family	102.5	7.1
Mobile Home	23.5	1.6
Commercial	12.6	0.9
Industrial	590.3	40.9
Utility	44.5	3.1
Institutional	35.3	2.5
Parkland	134.4	9.3
Other (Agriculture, Vacant)	380.6	26.4
Roads/ROW	118.9	8.2
TOTAL	1,442.6	100.0

Source: *Office of Land Development Services*

Also included in the analysis of this area is approximately 418 acres of unincorporated land on the south shore of the River. This area was included since the corresponding land on the opposite shore is within the City limits.

The north shore, west of Ed Bluestein Boulevard and the Montopolis Bridge along East 1st Street, consists of a mixture of uses such as service and convenience oriented commercial, warehousing and storage, small fabrication and manufacturing businesses, and single family residential. The residential structures are intermittently mixed among the commercial and industrial uses and are, for the most part, in poor structural condition. The area can be characterized as consisting of small parcel sizes and mixed incompatible uses.

The north shore east of Ed Bluestein Boulevard consists of large tracts of land that are vacant or used for resource excavation and related industrial uses. A large tract of land owned by the State borders Webberville Road, Walnut Creek and the river. The residential areas consist of single family development located near Hester Road and Shelton Road.

Located on the south shore between Pleasant Valley Road and Ed Bluestein Boulevard is Krieg Complex and several vacant tracts of land. Residential development consists of the Grove Mobile Home Park, located west of the Montopolis Bridge. This land has excellent frontage on the Colorado River and is owned by the City of Austin as a future park. A tract of City owned land also exists east of the bridge between Hergotz Lane and the river. Some single family dwellings exist adjacent to the river, on both sides of the Montopolis Bridge.

The unincorporated portion of the study area on the south shore beyond Ed Bluestein Boulevard consists of a large tract of undeveloped land used for resource extraction. Extraction activities have resulted in several large ponds along the river. A small enclave of single family residences is located near the intersection of Thompson Lane and Hergotz Lane.

Land Use Suitability—In general, land use in the Colorado River Corridor is not compatible with environmental and recreational values of a river near the heart of a city. Three major resource extraction sites appear largely unregulated and respond to the economic values of close proximity to deposits of sand and aggregate.

Of the 590 acres used for industrial purposes, nearly 75% represents the consumption and depletion of land through resource extraction. Little restoration and revegetation is visible although stockpiling of fill does exist; there appears to be little concern for ecological maintenance. While a narrow band of vegetation separates present extraction activities from the river, the encroachment is easily seen. The shoreline has not been altered substantially in recent and present activities as it was during operations of the 1960s.

Five large ponds and six smaller ponds are evidenced in extraction operation areas along the river at three main locations. Earthmoving equipment can be seen from the river as the cycle of depletion, consumption and fill continues.

This cycle suggests re-examination of the resource extraction permitting processes. Since irreparable, injurious public harm is taking place due to resource extraction, compensation seems imperative for future activities, including restoration, revegetation and set back requirements. Approximately 410 acres along the river is presently undergoing considerable environmental disturbance.

Presently, misfits along Red Bluff Road and East 1st Street include warehousing, garages, outdoor storage, petroleum storage and a mix of unrelated uses. Little encouragement or direction has been given to achieve land use sympathetic to the riverfront.

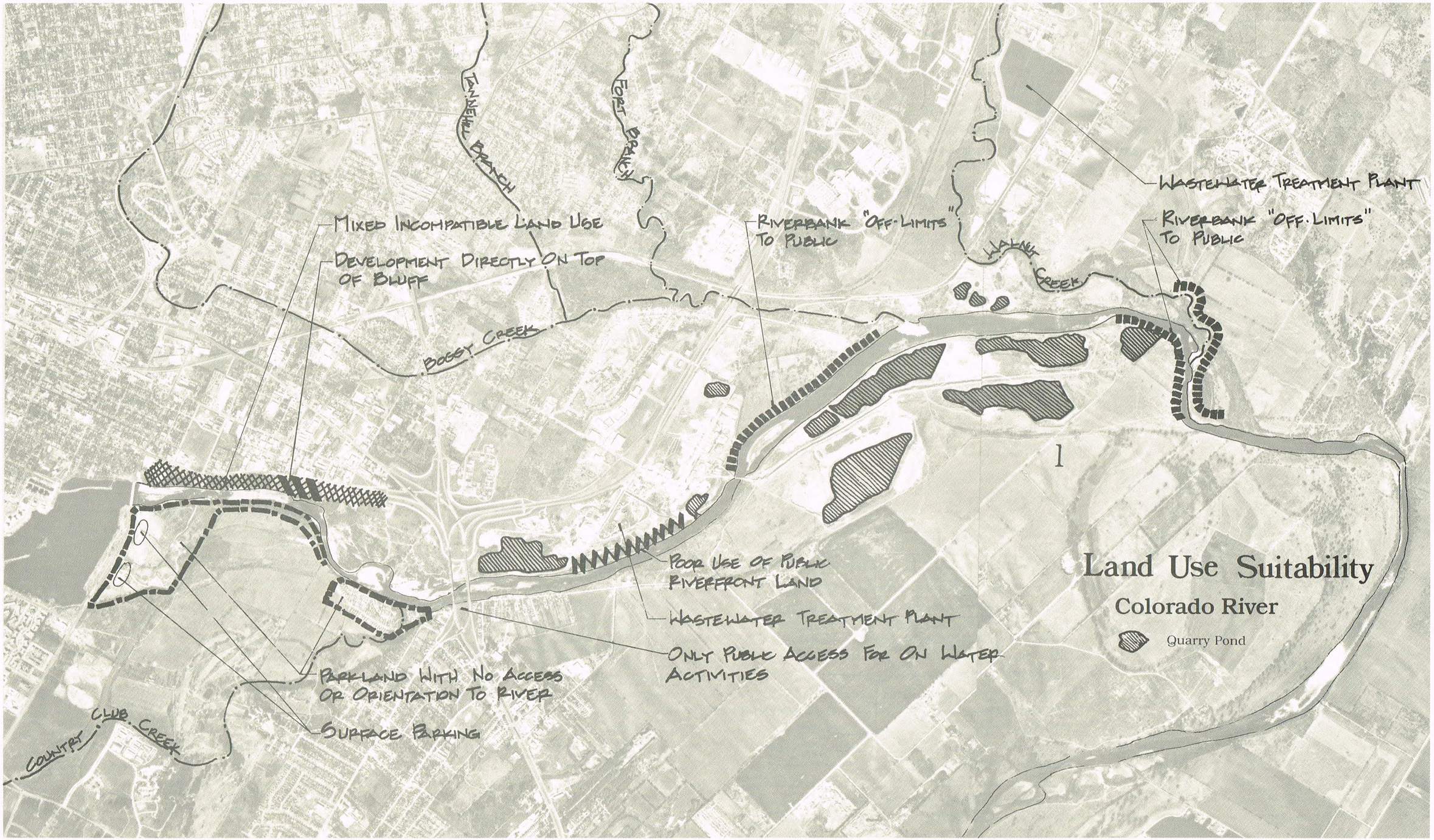
Zoning—The north shore west of the Montopolis Bridge consists of SF-3 (Single Family), CS (Commercial Services), and LI (Light Industrial). Several parcels of land zoned LI and CS located south of Red Bluff Road have frontage directly on the river, and businesses have been constructed that are visually incompatible with the shoreline. In some locations, parking and storage areas front directly on the shoreline causing increased runoff and erosion to the shoreline, along with water pollution. Increased setbacks from the shoreline are needed in this area. A large undeveloped tract of land located west of the Montopolis Bridge is zoned light industrial. This tract would provide excellent public access to the waterfront.

The north shore east of Ed Bluestein Boulevard is zoned for light industrial and single family residential. Although most existing development has not occurred near the shoreline, the potential still exists, thus setback requirements from the shoreline are needed.

The south shore is zoned MF-2 (Multi-family) and SF-3 (Single Family).

Access—Public access is limited to the boat ramp at the Montopolis Bridge. The most obvious need for additional access is along East 1st Street between Pleasant Valley Road and Ed Bluestein Boulevard because of the proximity to a large residential area. A large tract of undeveloped land on the north shore west of the Montopolis Bridge is accessible from Red Bluff Road and would make an excellent location for a park.

Public greenbelts along Boggy Creek and Walnut Creek could provide additional public access to the river.


TANNEHILL BRANCH
FORT BRANCH
MIXED INCOMPATIBLE LAND USE
DEVELOPMENT DIRECTLY ON TOP OF BLUFF
BOGEY CREEK
RIVERBANK "OFF-LIMITS" TO PUBLIC
WALNUT CREEK
WASTEWATER TREATMENT PLANT
RIVERBANK "OFF-LIMITS" TO PUBLIC
POOR USE OF PUBLIC RIVERFRONT LAND
WASTEWATER TREATMENT PLANT
ONLY PUBLIC ACCESS FOR ON WATER ACTIVITIES
PARKLAND WITH NO ACCESS OR ORIENTATION TO RIVER
SURFACE PARKING
COUNTRY CLUB CREEK
Land Use Suitability
Colorado River
Quarry Pond